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Good morning Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and the esteemed members of Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. The Connecticut chapter of the National Organization for Women (CT NOW) thanks you for the opportunity to present testimony in favor of the following two bills, S.B. 636 and H.B. 6121.

S.B. 636, AAC Affirmative Consent

Sexual violence on college campuses has received increased national attention over recent years. Today's students continue to face the specter, and all too often the reality, of sexual assault. However, victims continue to find the strength to come forward and share their experiences in the hope of creating change. These brave individuals have forced a national conversation on a topic that people often attempt to avoid. We also want to thank the bill's proponents, Sen. Flexer and Rep. Haddad, for bringing forward this important legislation.

S.B. 636 is another positive step forward. The onus of preventing sexual assault should not be placed on the victims. Educating students that "yes means yes" makes the entire student body responsible for making college campuses safer.

"No means no" ignores the potential inability of a victim to refuse sexual actions. It ignores the reality of the impact of drugs and alcohol, of social pressure, and of fear. The lack of an explicit "no" should never constitute consent. S.B. 636 takes Connecticut closer to a climate of support, a climate that allows those who have experienced sexual violence to feel safe speaking out, and a climate that denies perpetrators the right to hide behind the lack of explicit verbal protest. No student should feel unsafe or unheard. CT NOW respectfully asks the committee to vote favorably on this bill.

H.B. 6121, An Act Establishing a Fund Providing Scholarships to Women Pursuing Degrees in the STEM Field

The field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is one of the fastest growing job segments in the country. Connecticut is no exception. We have placed significant attention, both through policy and financial investments, on STEM jobs. Currently, women are extremely underrepresented in this field, despite the obvious benefits of entering an expanding, well-paying job market.

It is our hope that by establishing a dedicated scholarship fund, the state can encourage women to enter this traditionally male dominated field. Women deserve to feel welcomed into any job or course of study they choose to pursue, and CT NOW believes that H.B. 6121 brings us closer to accomplishing that. We respectfully urge the committee to vote favorably on H.B. 6121.